# PARTY FOR FREEDOM

OREET ASHERY

*Party for Freedom* is an evolving art project dedicated to the critique of specific aspects associated with Western Freedom (the term Western is used tentatively), such as the neo-Orientalism apparent in populist mediascapes. The work explores, amongst other things, the appropriation and instrumentalization of libertarian sentiments by Western political agendas; positing Islam as a threat to Freedom and resulting in anti-immigration policies and aggressive militant and diplomatic interventions in the Middle East. Judeo-Christian values are often consciously and unconsciously masqueraded as synonymous with notions of civilization, modernity, progress and secularization.

*Party for Freedom* explores the potentials and dilemmas of liberation in a culture at odds with itself, drawing upon histories of experimental performance, theatre and film, satire, biopolitics and popular media. The project is loosely based on Mayakovsky's evocative 1921 play *Mystery-Bouffe*, telling the story of the Clean and the Unclean, and responds to the political assassinations of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and Theo van Gogh in 2004, paving

the way to the ensuing popularity of Geert Wilders, the Dutch politician and leader of the far-right Partij voor de Vrijheid – Party for Freedom.

The work explores Freedom as a deeply conflicted and contradictory entity. *Party for Freedom* responds to the Freedom rhetoric of the far-right by turning its deep-seated and unconscious sentiments inside out. The historical baggage of the left-wing and ethos of the cultural avant-garde are also reflected upon via whitish nakedness, unresolved revolutions and indigenous appropriations of spirituality. *Party for Freedom* asks: Where do we go from here?

The work started as series of international workshops investigating trash aesthetics, nakedness, collective action and democratic sound. The last workshop, commissioned by *Performance Matters,* was a residential workshop/film-shoot based at the lush twelfth-century Rishangles Old Church in Suffolk. Following a methodology created specifically for the shoot, research material was introduced and scrambled in order to generate scenes involving an array of irreverent characters and scenarios performed by artists. The pervasive presence of the physical bum, or bums, in the work, helped to encapsulate many of the themes in *Party for Freedom*.

The shoot resulted in an hour-long audiovisual album made up of ten tracks, all with originally commissioned music. The AV album has been played as a live music concert with 17 musicians at Millbank Tower (London), intentionally part of the building-complex of the Conservative Party HQ, reclaiming the date of May Day, on 1 May 2013. The music concerts were also part of a solo show at Hippolyte Gallery, Helsinki, during October 2013, accidently but interestingly sharing the same building-complex as the True Finns HQ. The music for the AV album emerged from a long period of exploratory collaboration and was composed and played by the all-girl punk band Woolf, a contemporary classical ensemble composed and conducted by Timo-Juhani Kyllönen, and Morgan Quaintance with accompanying musicians playing jazz fusion.

For the next phase, the work was commissioned by Artangel as a live performance for invited, self-organized audience groups of minimum ten people and took place in private homes, offices, as well as public spaces such as art schools, pubs and clubs across London. The diverse locations were drawn from a long list of expressions of interest responding to an open call.






© Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire,* 'What Am I?' scene, 2013.
© Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire,* seducing 'Jeremy' scene, photograph by Manuel Vason, 2013.



© Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire*, auctioning 'Jeremy' scene, 2013.

The work, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire*, was performed in 25 diverse locations across London over a period of 7 weeks during spring 2013.

The group of live performers, selected from those who replied to a public call, responded to the AV album over a period of devising and rehearsing, with the projection of the film acting simultaneously as a protagonist, an additional performer, a backdrop and a constant moving prop in the performance. *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire* was a politically charged and absurdist performance that consisted of a tight structure alongside improvised and open-ended routines that at times involved the audience, a theatre of naked flame, gender and race displays, and questionable boundaries.

The performance had to be physically mobile and so props were light and came in three sizes: small, medium and large, to fit different size spaces. The performers, or travelling troupe, arrived at each unknown location with the props, be it an intimate living room or a large auditorium. Turning up dressed in white, setting up the props and installing the projection screen and speakers, as well as gradually stripping off and playing the guitar marked the start of the performance, whilst packing-up and getting dressed again in different sets of clothes indicated the end. One of the actions that involved the audience directly was the kidnapping



© Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire*, kidnapping 'Jeremy' scene, 2013.

of an audience member who was then rolled in a bright pink rug. Later on in the performance, the audience was asked to gradually strip off their shoes, socks and clothes, in an almost debased auction-style scenario in order to get the kidnapped audience member, always called 'Jeremy', back.

Another action involved three performers standing on boxes, directly addressing the audience. One performer began by introducing a female performer: 'Hello, hello, here is a "Moroccinian Boy"', then proceeded to mix gibberish with barely recognizable multilingual words, as he vaguely explained the supposed cultural invasion of Islam into hedonistic European capitals via parties, drugs, food and fashion. During this Oriental Dadaist commotion, a third performer persistently asks the audience, 'What am I? … What am I?', as he performs a series of nonsensical rhythmic movements.

At the end of the live performance period, the work was invited to art spaces, such as Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art in Copenhagen. For this purpose, and other future possibilities of distribution and showing of the work, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire* was documented in Artsadmin's Theatre space with an invited audience. This footage, alongside the *Party for Freedom* audiovisual album, was edited into a three-screen video installation, compressed here for the DVD, with the AV album primarily occupying the centre screen, creating a horizontal and vertical, back and forth wave between the album and the live performance, as well as a dialogue between two sets of communities of artist-performers over a time span of two years. The video installations are shown on large screens creating an immersive experience for the viewers who are encompassed by larger than life naked bodies, whilst also allowing for leaving and returning to the work for the duration of the exhibition, unlike the one-off impact of the concerts or the live performances. Over the two year period of the project, the process itself laid open a dialogue between research, performance, collaborations, documentation, film, music, distribution and the architecture of the sensorial viewing experience.

The artists performing in the work were selected for their own experimental performative art practices as well as their outstanding presence and diverse and extraordinary talents. In addition to this, *Party for Freedom* intentionally features 'whitish' performers only; young, trim and at least visibly healthy, as the fantasy-image of Western Freedom in the



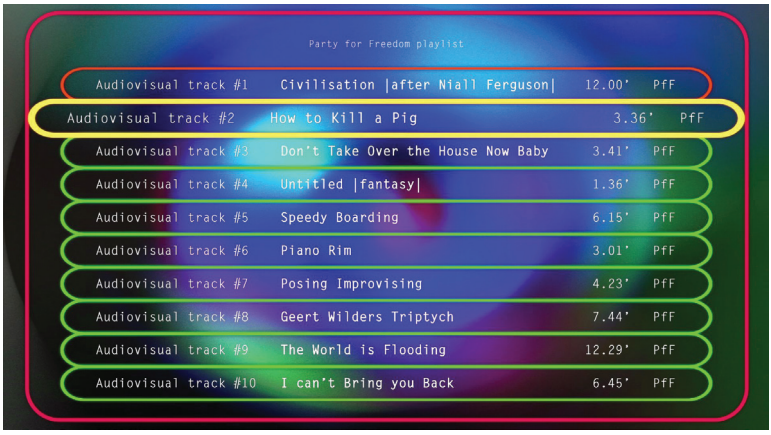

© Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album*, live concert at Millbank Tower with Woolf, Morgan Quaintance, Timo-Juhani Kyllönen, 1 May, 2013.

shape of white youthful privilege en masse. This impactful and disturbing visual device of a white-only ethnic group of bodies is further complicated and accentuated by the presence of an Asian performer, thus poking at the limits, materiality and boundaries of skin-tone that can just pass as white.

This DVD also includes three additional features. The first is a slideshow of 80 still images from *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire*, each from an invited performance, and taken by an audience member. The second is a series of filmed responses from each performer who took part in the intense experience of *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire*. The third is research notes, including texts and clips that did not make their way into the work.

Altogether, the DVD, accompanied by TJ Demos' essay 'The Unfinished Revolution: Oreet Ashery's *Party for Freedom*', brings together representational aspects of the work outside the live or art-space viewing experience of the work, in a condensed form that enhances and contextualizes the processes, ideas, imagery and methodologies unique to this project.

*Oreet Ashery, 2013*







© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album*, playlist, video still, 2013.
© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album: Don't Take Over the House Now Baby*, video still, 2013.

# THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION
# OREET ASHERY'S PARTY FOR FREEDOM
## BY TJ DEMOS

In *Geert Wilders Triptych,* track 8 of Oreet Ashery's hour-long video *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album* (2013), a man is shown chasing a woman around the grass, grunting 'Geert' as they go. Both are naked and on all fours. Tracking his female prey in this bizarre tale of sexual experimentation and political theatre – 'Geert' references Dutch rightwing politician Geert Wilders – the man kicks like a donkey, and eventually succeeds in grabbing her leg and bringing her down face-first on the ground, as a dog looks on and appears miffed by the curious display. Reminiscent of the scene of the nude chase in *The Idiots*, Lars von Trier's 1998 comedy-drama film in which characters attempt to get in touch with their inner-idiot in a related critical acting-out of European libertarianism-become-libertinage, Ashery's ribald allegory of humans-become-animals offers a subversive mimicry of Wilders' extreme-right Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom). As such, her moving-image work, constituting ten interconnected tracks, reveals what Fredric Jameson would call the 'political unconscious' of rightwing political

discourse, exposing its underlying 'problematics of ideology, of the unconscious and of desire, of representation, of history, and of cultural production.'[1]

Coming after two years of research, Ashery's video interweaves complex elements of experimental performance, nude theatre and political satire, punk music and trash aesthetics, in order to deconstruct, via cutting parody, the paradoxical ideology that joins the freedoms of sexual transgression to the xenophobic and murderous intolerance of outsiders. Some of these concerns follow Ashery's related recent performances and interventions, including her *Naked as a Jaybird* (2011) for which a group of figures stripped naked in a supermarket in London, exploring connections between biopolitics and bare life in relation to migration, citizenship, and outsider status; and her *Monkey Bum Factory* (2011) which continued this engagement in Bourges, France, through further public displays of nudity and bodily abjection, doing so in relation to diverse historical precedents of body art, the use of humans as paint brushes, and sexual politics by such artists as Yves Klein and Annie Sprinkle.

One key reference for this cycle of works, and which is particularly significant for Ashery's *Party for Freedom* video, is Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1918/1921 play *Mystery-Bouffe*, which relays the story of the Clean and the Unclean, updated by Ashery, as per the Russian playwright's wishes, to the political context of the moment. In her creative appropriation, the play is made to respond to the current-day struggle between European neo-conservativism and the perceived threat of the influx of Islam, contextualized by the populist demagoguery of racist nationalism, and the recent murders of outspoken politico Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo van Gogh, events definitional to Holland in the years following 9/11 and the politicized rhetoric around terrorism, Western values, and the clash of civilizations. The video also explores connections between the current-day defence of freedom and its relation to earlier twentieth-century movements around nudism and sexual emancipation. It does so by drawing together a diverse range of references, recalling the history of counter-cultural naturalist movements, select moments in body art (such as that of the Viennese Actionists, who worked through the trauma of the Second



© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album: Geert Triptych, I/III* video still, 2013.

World War via controversial, staged rituals of bodily punishment), and visceral musical forms like punk, introduced in the video by those parts of the soundtrack written and performed by the all-girl band Woolf. In each case, aesthetic forms such as DIY video, avant-garde nude performance, naturalist photography, and hardcore music, are shown to be highly unstable politically; all are overdetermined sites of paradoxical values.

The discourse of freedom is one such conflicted site, which can join individual liberties to vengeful intolerance, especially as they come together in the Party for Freedom, founded in 2005 by Geert Wilders and now the third largest in the Netherlands. Wilders developed his model of populist neo-liberalism and anti-multiculturalism following the highly mediatized murders of van Gogh and Fortuyn, who had recently joined libertarianism, nationalism, and anti-immigrant (and particularly anti-Islamic) ideology in an agenda that has defined Dutch politics in the era of 'War on Terror' globalization. The video's track 3, *Don't Take over the House Now Baby,* for instance, includes appropriated media footage of Fortuyn speaking at a publicity event in Almere (a planned city near Amsterdam), where he discusses his commitment to 'fighting Islam' and his support for 'enlightenment' and 'humanism.' 'Imagine the army of Ali Baba, here in Europe!', he explains

to a roaring crowd of supporters. As a response, he contends that the 'guest cannot take over the house', which has become a motto of the Dutch right, as its position neatly summarizes anti-immigrant legislation and the fantasy of controlling Holland's and Europe's borders in the name of its rightful property owners. As Dutch anthropologist Peter van der Veer points out, 'the Dutch feel that they have recently freed themselves from Christian conservativism [during struggles in the 1960s] only to be confronted again by Islamic injunctions [in the 1990s and 2000s].'[2] That said, it was the politically motivated murders that brought this discourse to national attention: Fortuyn was killed in 2002 in Hilversum by animal and environmental rights activist Volkert van der Graaf (who wanted to stop Fortuyn from treating Muslims as scapegoats), and his violent death, a week before the elections, catalyzed a huge win for the right. Although Fortuyn was a staunch Marxist in the 1960s (his first job was lecturer in Marxist sociology at University of Groningen), his later transformation into a vocal neo-conservative spokesman against the perceived threat of foreigners contributed to the right-wing surge that has spread across Europe, led by such analogues as Jörg Haider in Austria, Filip de Winter in Belgium, and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France.

Rather than rely on direct footage of the likes of Fortuyn, Wilders and van Gogh, Ashery's video introduces their intertwined political positions via coded playful allegories and performative displays of psycho-sexual drama and physical game playing. These translate into revelations of the deep-seated elements of right-wing ideology that at once celebrates individual liberties in the realm of sexuality (being gay, displaying the naked body, engaging in unconventional sexual practices), and expresses a racist resentment of immigrants, with their alleged attempts to 'take over the house' and ostensibly install their own theocratic culture based on Islamic Sharia law. The resulting paradox of freedom and repression is dramatized throughout Ashery's video, where 'freedom' is shown to be a relational and deeply conflictual practice, according to which the freedom of some is inextricably tied to the unfreedom of others. The point that Ashery develops is clarified by political theorist Wendy Brown: 'freedom is neither a philosophical absolute nor a tangible entity but a relational and contextual practice that takes shape in opposition to whatever is locally and ideologically conceived as un-freedom.'[3]



© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album: I Can't Bring you Back*, video still, 2013.

In Ashery's video, this tension unfolds in relation to the body, approximating what van der Veer terms the 'contradictory politics of desire' as it pertains to Dutch right-wing cultural and political discourse.[4] The site of boundaries and portals between inside and outside, the body is selectively opened up and controlled, transgressed sexually and violated politically, in Ashery's work. In various sections of the video, figures are seen, for instance playing naked games in groups in the green space that surrounds the twelfth-century country church in Suffolk that serves as the set for much of the piece. In track 9, *The World is Flooding*, they dramatize a hippie, psychedelic, out-of-doors love-in, in *I Can't Bring you Back* they undergo a nude séance in order to attempt to communicate with van Gogh's and Fortuyn's spirits with the aid of a Ouija board, and in *Posing, Improvising* they assume softcore sexual positions in twos and threes, and adopt postures and movements that suggest animalistic transformations of the human body. These scenes of animality, primitive ritual, group sex, childlike games, and insane theatrics are at once desublimatory of conventional relations to the body, transgressive of heteronormative and couple-dominated sexuality, and sacrilegious of religion-based ethics.



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The *Piano Rim* sequence of track 6 is the most avant-garde and sexually explicit, showing a young man standing while playing the piano as he tongues the ass of an androgynous figure positioned on hands and knees before him on the piano, while a young woman stands nonchalantly occupied with social networks on her laptop placed on the other side of the piano. Boundaries between human and animal, self and other, public and private, normative and unconventional sexuality, are here violated in this act of freedom.

Meanwhile, a corresponding and opposite desire for the annihilation of the body of the Other – approximating the phantom-object of right-wing resentment regarding the non-Western Islamic immigrant – transpires in scenes such as the fourth vignette, *Untitled | Fantasy*. The passage shows a group of bloodied Arabs, one wearing a traditional keffiyeh headdress, others with religious skullcaps, all lying dead on a public bench outdoors. As if victims of neo-fascist violence, they are objectified in a state of complete domination, a scene resonant with the anti-immigrant brutality that has taken hold in European countries from Holland to Greece, France to Italy, in recent years. A few moments later, the actors emerge from their lifeless slumber and wash off the fake blood, revealing themselves to be white European-looking actors dressed in costume, thereby exposing the



© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album: Piano Rim*, video still, 2013.

constructed basis of the fantasy. In this regard, Ashery's engagement with migration and politically attuned performance recalls the artist's past work, for instance, *Portrait Sketch* (2006) for which she inhabited stereotypes of Jewish and Islamic identities and had herself drawn by street-based portrait artists in Delhi. Similarly, her concern for immigration and displacement continues her past investigations into the politics of citizenship and border regimes in her native Middle Eastern context, as in *A Gathering* (2006) for which she held a banquet in London for Palestinians prevented from returning home by Israeli restrictions; and *Welcome Home | Memorial Service* (2006) a collaborative performance project for which three Palestinian voices recited the names of 369 Palestinian villages that were destroyed during the war around 1948 when Israel was created.

As in these works, and especially in the related projects of *Naked as a Jaybird* and *Monkey Bum Factory*, it is the body that is shown to be one of bare life: a site where sexual de-politicization and political exclusion collide, exposing an oscillating paradox of freedom and unfreedom, the one built on the other.[5] The contradictory politics of desire ascribed to the Party for Freedom exists in the sense that one type of freedom (individualist, liberal, sexual) excludes other kinds of freedoms (those of migration, multiculturalism,



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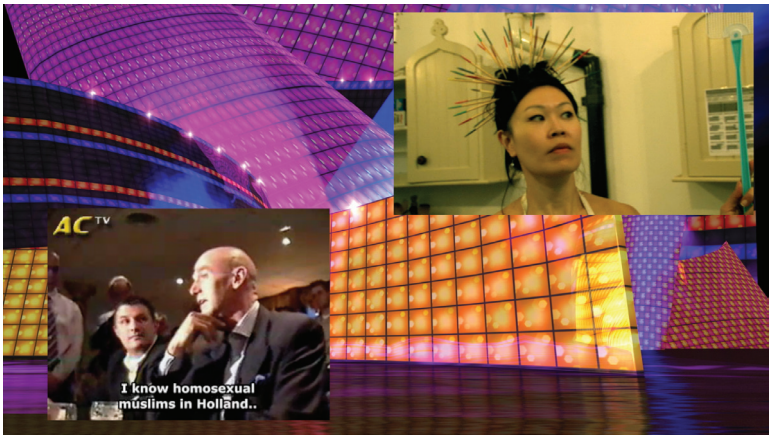
religious freedom), yet each appears constituted by the exclusion of its other. As a result, sexual freedom, tolerance of difference, and democratic principles are revealed to inspire an opposing state of control, flipping into intolerance, repression, and illiberal governance. In terms of that fantasy of control, Ashery's political allegory echoes other contemporary artistic projects that have critically taken up European populist politics to critical ends, such as Jonas Staal's *Art, Property of Politics III: Closed Architecture* (2011).[6] The design-based and conceptualist piece reconstructs the prison architecture of Dutch politician and Geert Wilders-confidant Fleur Agema, who dedicated herself to designing the ideal penal complex for her MA thesis in Interior Design at Utrecht School of Arts. Reproducing a visual model of Agema's prison that draws out its logic of the biopolitical control of subjects who fail to integrate into Dutch social conventions, Staal writes of it: 'the whole of society' becomes 'a model for detention: everyone is trapped in their own social conditions, poor and rich alike.' Sharing the ambition to deconstruct right-wing political ideology, Ashery's project distinguishes itself by animating the psycho-sexual imaginary of the Freedom Party's fears and fantasies of transgressed boundaries, particularly when such a carceral society of control breaks down and engenders ever greater urges for control and domination.

Providing a response to Jameson's call to historicize the political unconscious of contemporary ideological formations, Ashery's video locates the precedents of contemporary freedom discourse in nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberation movements, communes, and experimental sexual practices. The genealogy is relayed explicitly in track 10, *I Can't Bring You Back*, even while this complex history's legacy is present throughout the video. There, Ashery's group of nude actors are shown attempting to communicate with the spirits of Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, as the video adds a pedagogical, male voice-over beginning with a description of the *Nachtkulture* (naked culture) and *Lebensreform* (life reform) movements in modern Germany. The embrace of nudism in rural nature, we learn, was once viewed as an antidote to industrialization and urbanization, initially seen as a progressive departure from Christian prohibitions and conservative cultural restrictions. As such naturism was first sponsored by the Nazis, then restricted as a suspect breeding ground for leftists and homosexuals, and finally embraced under the state-controlled leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength Through Joy) – as long as communists and Jews were excluded and activities took place in the countryside only. German naturism underwent further ideological revaluing as it migrated to California, sparking groups like the Nature Boys, a 1940s subculture of proto-hippies that prepared the ground for later counter-cultural formations in the 1960s, formations that were further inverted in a post-emancipatory return-to-order in subsequent decades. The magazine *Jaybird*, for instance, begun in Southern California during the 1960s, initially dedicated itself to carefree family nudism, aligned with the counter-culture movement, but increasingly took to supplying softcore porn to the erotica market, replacing nudists with paid models, its anti-establishment revolt adopted to post-60s capitalist liberalism. As Ashery's narrative points out, the vicissitudes of freedom discourse ended up not only in commercial spectacle, but also in the perverse violence of right-wing hate, as exemplified in Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik's act of killing 77 Labour Party supporters. He justified the rampage in his militant creed, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, the anti-Islam, anti-feminist,

and anti-Marxist text he distributed over the internet on the day of the attacks. Here, the necropolitical basis of far-right extremist claims on freedom, as allegorized in Ashery's video, is concretely glimpsed.[7]

Focused on these political and aesthetic contradictions, *Party for Freedom* offers a tale of dreamworld and catastrophe, utopia and tragedy, radicalism and recuperation. On the one hand, sexual freedom was partly emancipated from oppressive traditions of monogamy, pro-creation sexuality, and Christian intolerance, although even twentieth-century counter-cultural movements tended to reaffirm patriarchal and heteronormative structures, as Ashery is keen to point out. On the other hand, the outgrowth of emancipatory body politics has come, in some extreme forms, to correspond to the repressive, racist and murderous politics of current-day neo-liberal freedom crusaders.[8] In Ashery's video, we witness nudism become commodified sex and pornography; feminism become patriarchy; socialism become authoritarianism; liberation become xenophobic repression – contradictions played out as well in further scenes of parodic allegory. In track 3 *Don't Take over the House Now Baby*, a 'housewife' played by an Asian woman dressed in a sexually objectifying maid outfit swats flies in her kitchen, intimating in the artist's coded sign language that immigrants are no better than filthy and invasive insects in need of extermination. Yet the video's gaudy depiction of the host exercising her right to walk around naked in her own house – and more broadly the right of the Dutch to sexual freedom in their own country – resonates with tawdry scenarios of pornography. As such, sexual 'liberation' connects with the 'freedoms' of sexist exploitation, calling up Holland's infamy as European capital for sex tourism. The woman's Asian appearance, furthermore, raises the spectre of trafficked women from outside Europe, whereby non-Dutch others are accepted as long as they keep to their allotted place and accept Dutch values. In this sense, sexual liberation and the blackmarket enslavement of women explosively connect.

Ashery's psycho-political dramas of objectified Asian women, murdered and bloodied Arabs, and bestiality and zoophilia stage various binaries between self and Other that oscillate between sexual desire and murderous loathing. As such, the video explicitly calls up the hysterical




© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album: Don't Take Over the House Now Baby*, video still, 2013.

structuring of the right-wing cultural imaginary as displayed in *Submission* (2004), van Gogh and Aayan Hirsi Ali's video that presents their stilted and one-sided view of Islam. In one section of the short, infamous video that has been broadcast on Dutch TV, a topless woman is shown in transparent clothing and a black veil standing on an oriental rug in a dark lusty boudoir, praying to Allah. The clichéd set is complemented by an autobiographical commentary in which the woman narrates her life of subjection to her violent husband, the fruit of an arranged marriage, as Middle Eastern music and the sounds of a cracking whip play in the background. Shots of her bleeding, violated body, intercut with views of her skin covered in calligraphic inscriptions of the Koran describing the necessity of submission, relay her savage treatment, based also on tales of repeated rapes at the hands of her husband's brother. The horrid stories make the fact that the character attempts to justify her self-hating obedience via religious conviction all the more horrendous – a kneejerk response that is the ideological effect of the video. As such, the work articulates a propagandistic condemnation of Islam, swinging between a neo-Orientalist lasciviousness and a punishing racist contempt, its script written by Hirsi



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Ali, who herself fled Somalia to escape an arranged marriage and ending up in Holland as a staunch critic of Islam and eventual poster-child of the far-right. In referencing the video, Ashery's *Party for Freedom* points out that Hirsi Ali's partner is the British conservative economic historian Niall Ferguson, whose 2011 book *Civilisation: The West and the Rest*, dedicated to his wife (just as Ashery's first track, also called *Civilisation,* is dedicated to Ferguson), has been attacked for its neo-liberal triumphalism, Western-centric chauvinism, and implicit racism.[9] The reference is also important in that it shows how right-wing populism extends throughout Europe, even if its particular instantiations are not identical (Ferguson's homophobia, for which he recently apologized in the media, for instance, conflicts with some Dutch rightwing discourse).

Ashery's video responds to Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's provocation with her own imagined scenario of pleasure and disgust, particularly in track 8 *Geert Wilders Triptych*. The scene is set outdoors amidst trees and greenery, with a young woman shown sitting on a swing, attended by a young man, proposing something of a Fragonardian pleasure garden à la Marquis de Sade. As the woman's libertine partner feeds her some sort of raspberry mush, he smears the substance on her bare chest. She consumes the food to



© Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom | An Audiovisual Album: How to Kill a Pig*, video still, 2013.

excess, only to vomit it out, followed by a self-satisfying smile. The abject material consequently functions as a transitional object, at once outside and inside the body, part and not-part of the self, provoking alternating signs of desire and repulsion. Translating van Gogh and Hirsi Ali's propagandistic video act into a dismal display of shit-spewing logorrhoea, the passage also recalls Pasolini's notorious scene of coprophagia in his 1975 film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, a like-minded allegorical drama of fascist sadomasochistic excess set in the late-stages of Second World War Italy. It is ultimately that psycho-sexual state – between narcissistic hedonism and loathing abjection – that Ashery's film locates as the structuring political unconscious of the Party for Freedom, expressing its underlying desires, its unacknowledged fears and fantasies.

Infamously, van Gogh referred to Muslims as that 'secret column of goat-fuckers', and Fortuyn confessed 'he liked fucking young Moroccan boys but did not want to be restrained by backward imams'.[10] This tendency to animalize and sexualize the Other informs the emphasis in *Party for Freedom* on the becoming-animal of humans. Consider the shot of the naked woman dressed like a roasting pig in track 2, *How to Kill a Pig*, and the frequent inclusions of images of nonhuman primates, dogs,



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and insects. In addition, the video's frequent shots of human bums – revealed for the camera, displayed often from below, and dutifully held in place for inspection – position its subjects in so many animal postures, whereby the piece develops a conflictual politics of anality. In Ashery's scatological tale, the human backside figures as indeterminate signifier – as the object of sexual desire; the suspect site of the biopolitics of security (particularly in the strip and cavity search scene, *Speedy Boarding | Security First*, intercut with shots of incandescently coloured clown faces expressing disgust); and the orifice for the excrescence of wretched substances (food expelled from the anus-mouth, implying the ejection of outsiders from the country). In this way, bodily desublimation flips into political expulsion, and sexualisation correlates with fantasized extermination.

While Ashery's critical mimicry clearly attacks the Party for Freedom, it is not simply, in my view, a deconstructive dramatization of the underlying psychology that drives right-wing ideology. Ultimately, by inhabiting past forms of avant-garde transgression and emancipatory politics, the project returns to sexual liberation and multiculturalism as unfinished revolutions, which await an eventual reckoning, if not ultimate resolution.



@ Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire, London Metropolitan University*, picture taken by audience member.

Its transgressive elements – particularly its sexual experimentation and gender-questioning playfulness – might yet be re-radicalized, the video suggests by re-animating these forms, which points toward the embrace of a post-heteronormative, pro-polymorphous perversity. As such, the project identifies the progressive elements of a potential state of pluralist living-together, albeit in a non-programmatic way, although it provides no answer to the thorny question of what a reconciliation between the freedoms of sexual liberation and religion would mean or look like, or even if the artist would support such a reconciliation.

A further key is the project's grassroots distribution form, according to which institutions, businesses and groups of a minimum of ten people are invited to host *Party for Freedom*'s live performance event, *Party for Hire*, which includes nude displays and screenings of the video. Ashery describes the project as 'somewhere between a travelling cinema and theatre troupe,

a kiss-a-gram and a takeaway delivery service.'[11] The one-hour event comprises the display of the video, during which nude actors, both women and men, complement on-screen passages by performing various live vignettes, including cavorting around the room, wrestling in an inflatable boat, caressing a paint-splattered pig sculpture, and riding each other like animals. (One of the more memorable scenes from the performance at UCL's Centre for the Study of Contemporary Art on 15 May, was of a woman posing on all fours holding a banana in her mouth that sprouted a lit sparkler, with another such pyrotechnic device inserted in her bum, creating a spectacular display of sexual objectification and animalization).

The performance exerts a seductive invitation to the audience to join in and get naked themselves, even while the video reveals the over-determination of the body as a contradictory and unstable site of freedom – both as a white, heteronormative, and youthful privilege (exemplified in Ashery's typological determination of the actors' body-types and identities to correspond to a select range of appearances), and coded within radically divergent ideological formations, including emancipatory libertarianism, counter-cultural subversiveness, fascist purity, neo-nationalist xenophobia, and murderous hate speech. The viewer, then, comes to inhabit the affective site that rotates between desire and disgust, attraction and repulsion, as s/he witnesses the spectacle whereby the illusion of nude abandon reveals how the body is situated within relations of power, and where freedom itself crumbles as an innocent pleasure or essentialized category. Sexuality is thereby denaturalized, becomes radically unstable, and as a result, viewers experience a state of estrangement from their own body, and that of others, which precipitates a powerful questioning – at once critically conceptual and viscerally affective – of sexual dynamics, nudity and their relations to freedom claims, especially as the final track delivers the short history of the modern transformations of that discourse.

Reliant upon and encouraging the self-organizing capacity of audiences and supporters of the project, the *Party* also proposes and provokes an informal network of activity and resistance, which constitutes a further politically progressive element, however modest and undefined. Additionally, the launch of Ashery's project occurred on the symbolically

significant date of 1 May – International Workers' Day – and at the site of Millbank Tower, the location of the Tory headquarters and of the massive anti-government protest in 2010 that saw a flood of demonstrators (including the artist) break into the building in a spectacular act of anti-austerity-budget rebellion (another unfinished revolution). As Ashery writes, 'holding the event in Millbank is another way of reclaiming the space, re-visiting the building and asking what new strategies of resistance are available to us. When does intervention become cooption? Can art resist cooption now?'[12] Including live musical performances, naked body art, and the screening of the *Party for Freedom* video, the launch resonated with the carnivalesque energies of recent political protests, which, in the era of alter-globalization demos sparked by the 1999 'Battle in Seattle' anti-WTO uprising, have increasingly offered a mixture of the creative visual aesthetics of resistance, performative displays and theatrical activism.[13]

On that opening night, the audience was introduced to what Ashery terms a 'democracy of sound', comprising diverse approaches to music, including the chamber-orchestral modernism of Finnish composer Timo-Juhani Kyllönen, the experimental sounds of Yakutian-Russian musician Chyskyyrai, the punk noise music of the four-piece band Woolf, and the hardcore-jazz fusion of Morgan Quaintance's band. These constituted a diversity of approaches to sonic experimentation that one finds as well on the video's soundtrack.[14] As such, Ashery's project advances further its positive proposal: Turning away from the failures of multiculturalism and its problematic 'tolerance' for difference, which all-too-often dissembles discriminatory views,[15] it suggests a modelling of cultural co-existence that acknowledges both strangeness within all (rejecting the very opposition between self and other), and the ever-potential manifestations of social antagonisms between subjects. It also invites the reinvention of socio-sexual organization in ways not bound to the conventions of heteronormativity, appropriative desire, and couple-dominated, monogamous relations.[16] In this regard, the *Party* cultivates practices below and outside the all-encompassing policy directives and totalizing governmentality of institutionalized multiculturalism.[17] It does so by taking into account and expressing the unconscious of subjects, rather than repressing those fantasy





@ Oreet Ashery, *Party for Freedom | Party for Hire, London, Royal Academy*, picture taken by audience member.

and fears and thereby inviting violent forms of acting-out. If there is a utopian element in Ashery's approach, then, it is located in the project's implicit emancipatory proposals that decline to systematize their practice or codify their procedures. Rather, the project defines spaces where the inevitable differences between people and social groups are negotiated in informal, spontaneous and collectivist ways, reliant on a shared commitment to creativity.

Finally, Ashery's project includes a month of related discursive events during May-June 2013, such as 'People vs. Freedom on land, animals and women' at the Swedenborg Society with feminist-activist Silvia Federici; 'People vs. Freedom on being offensive, UK visas, immigration profiteering and state control' with Shaista Aziz, Manick Govinda and Kenan Malik, Corporate Watch, and Precarious Workers; and 'People vs. Freedom in conversation' with Tirdad Zolghadr.[18] As much as *Party for Freedom* attempts to reproduce and thereby negate the political unconscious of recent forms of far-right extremism, it also presents us with a principle of hope that such people-centered creativity, grassroots cooperation, and artist-activist networks will not only subject the populist discourse of intolerance to critical scrutiny and discussion, but also invent future ways to move beyond such a repressive politics, reconnecting with and advancing further the unfinished revolutions of the past.

1. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 13.
2. Peter van der Veer, *Pim Fortuyn, Theo van Gogh, and the Politics of Tolerance in the Netherlands* (Public Culture 18:1, 2006), p. 120. He writes further: 'the main issue in the murder of van Gogh is not Islam but Dutch culture' and the paradox of tolerance and liberal values. He points out that Dutch tolerance discourse goes back to Spinoza, a history increasingly forgotten owning to right-wing financial cuts to the Dutch educational system (pp. 112-13).
3. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 6.
4. Peter van der Veer, 'Pim Fortuyn'. Also see: Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

5. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
6. For further artistic models that critically examine political populism in Europe today, see *Enacting Populism in its Mediascape*, the 2012 exhibition project at the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris, curated by Matteo Lucchetti, which Ashery references in *Party for Freedom*.
7. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Public Culture 15:1, Winter 2003), pp. 11-40.
8. See David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).
9. See Pankaj Mishra, 'Watch This Man', review of Niall Ferguson, *Civilisation: The West and the Rest* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), in *London Review of Books*, 33. 21 (3 November 2011), pp. 10-12.
10. Peter van der Veer, 'Pim Fortuyn', p. 111 and p. 120. In addition, Ashery points out that Wilders has acknowledged forming his low opinion of Arab cultures after visiting Israel and Egypt as a child. During the trip he contracted a stomach bug in Egypt, and this childhood trauma allegedly determined his adult political views – a story that informs the sentence 'How can such a small thing get so big' found in Ashery's video. Based on the article *Mainstreaming Hate*, by Ferry Biedermann, Foreign Policy, 4 October, 2010.
11. See the artist's website: www.oreetashery.net, http://www.artangel.org.uk//projects/2013/party_for_freedom/about_the_project/about_the_project.
12. Email to author, 24 April 2013.
13. See Claire Tancons, 'Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnivalesque as Protest Sensibility', *e-flux* 30 (December 2011).
14. Conversation with the artist, 2 May 2013.
15. For Brown, 'tolerance discourse' – as a form of governmentality that regulates social, cultural, and political groupings – often works to 'restore the hegemony that state-sponsored egalitarianism threatens to undermine.' See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), nt. 2, p. 208.
16. For diverse theorizations of such recent possibilities of non-normative sexual practice, see Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Dossie Easton, *Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 2011).
17. See Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism* (London: Zed Books, 2011), which offers a complex reading of the highly complex valences, practices, and effects of multiculturalism. They write: 'The idea that too much relativism has allowed culturally regressive minorities to en-danger the fight against sexism and homophobia suggests that these are purely struggles between the West – the birthplace of democracy, human rights, and singular achievements in gender equality and sexual freedom – and the rest, most problematically those illiberal subjects who have been allowed to live among us. Multiculturalism – not the institutionalized sexism, patriarchal structures or homophobia that affects all societies – can be blamed for the persistence of domestic violence, or the violation of gay rights.' http://www.opende- mocracy.net/ourkingdom/alana-lentin-gavan-titley/ crises-of-multiculturalism.
18. Talks are now available as audio files on http://www.artangel.org.uk//projects/2013/party_for_freedom/talks_audio/talks_audio.

Oreet Ashery is a London-based artist, working across mediums in performance, still and moving image, objects and writing, mainly in the context of post-identity, biopolitics and minority discourses, and is continuously exploring the appearance of the political and the participatory nature of events, situations and public platforms. Ashery exhibits, performs, intervenes and screens her work extensively in an international context. Ashery has published books, monographs, catalogues and pamphlets, and her work has been discussed in numerous art and cultural reviews, chapters, interviews and essays in many languages. Ashery is a Visiting Professor at the Royal College of Art, Painting Department, an Honorary Research Fellow in the Drama Department at Queen Mary, University London, and a lecturer in the Art Department at Goldsmiths.

**Artists performing in *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album*:**
*Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album* was filmed at the twelfth century Rishangles Old Church in Suffolk in September 2011 during a residential workshop/filmshoot commissioned by *Performance Matters*. The film was edited with support from Crossovers.
**Kimbal Bumstead, Miles Coote, Edd Hobbs, Lucy Hutson, Tim Owen Jones, Eirini Kartsaki, Lynn Lu, Runa Norheim, Owen G. Parry, Vanda Playford, Irene Revell**

**Artists performing in *Party for Freedom* | *Party for Hire*:**
*Party for Freedom* | *Party for Hire*, an Artangel commission and production, was a series of live performances devised in response to *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album*, performed in 25 locations during Spring 2013. Spaces included private homes, offices, art schools, pubs, clubs and more. Footage on this DVD was made during a live performance session filmed especially for documentation purposes.
**Andro Andrex, Soren Evinson, Elizabeth B. Harris, Alex Der Matis, Phoebe Osborne, Andrew Kerton, Alice MacKenzie**

**Voice-over:** Nick Ellsworth

**Music:**
**Woolf**
All playlist music + *Untitled* + End credits

**Timo-Juhani Kyllönen**
*Civilisaton* + *Speedy Boarding* + *The World is Flooding* (part II) + *I Can't Bring you Back*

**Morgan Quaintance**
*Geert Triptych I* + *Geert Triptych II* + *Geert Triptych III* + *Posing Improving*

**Chyskyyrai**
*The World is Flooding* (part I)

**Camera *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album*:**
Oreet Ashery, Anna Matos, Vanda Playford

**Camera *Party for Freedom* | *Party for Hire*:**
Lisa Cazzato Vieyra, Native Voice Films

***Party for Freedom* project and DVD Editor:**
Guillem Serrano

**Visual FX *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album*:**
Daria Fissoun

**Sound Mixing *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album*:**
Alfredo Paz

**DVD Extra Features:**

***Party for Freedom* | *Party for Hire* responses from performers:**
Andro Andrex, Soren Evinson, Elizabeth B. Harris, Alex Der Matis, Phoebe Osborne, Andrew Kerton, Alice MacKenzie

**Slideshow of 80 photographs from *Party for Freedom* | *Party for Hire* taken in 25 locations by audience members.**

***Party for Freedom* research notes:**
Clips include: Naked as a Jaybird intervention; Monkey Bum Factory performance clip; William Klein's Mr. Freedom clip, Shaista Aziz, comedy Store, Manchester clip.

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